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American Diplomacy, 1900-1950 by George F. Kennan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. viii, 140 p. $2.75. Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures.)

In the six lectures of this brochure the organizer of the Policy Planning Staff of Department of State lays the theoretical foundation of our foreign policy by analyzing the episodes of three wars, one policy commitment and one situation, with further observations on "Diplomacy in the Modern World." He reprints two papers on the Soviet Union from Foreign Affairs as examples of policy reasoning. In a neat, incisive style he summarizes historical records comprehensively, with one exception, and studs his pages with gems of political prescience. Perhaps because he is so near to the incubus of the conflict of power forced on the world by totalitarian theology, he disregards the traditional policies of American national interest that instinctively inform and control action. Such recent formulations of them as the "fundamental principles" of the Secretary of State of July 16, 1937 or the "guiding principles" of the President of October 27, 1945 are available frames of reference for examination of any episode.

Mr. Kennan finds that each of his chosen episodes exhibits American "mistakes", sometimes on our own, sometimes by misapprehension of the international situation. Typically, he finds that we entered the Spanish war for subjective and emotional reasons, conducted it badly on plans of dubious origin and ended it with the impulsive acquisition of foreign territory. But we should not reproach our forebearers "for we are poor judges of their

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trials and tribulations". (There are similar hedges in other lectures.) Here there is no mention that national safety and Caribbean order were involved and no inkling that events forced us belatedly into a role as a "great power", which we unwittingly were. Mr. Kennan implies that the "anti-imperialists" of the time were more nearly right; if so, one who knew them can testify that, aside from different vocality, their influence was approximately nil.

To this reviewer the least convincing lecture is "Mr. Hippisley and the OpenDoor". The author relies on Griswold's embellishment of Tyler Dennett's pet piece of research and disregards the fact that freedom of trade got into American blood as early as the Boston Tea Party. The idea was behind opposition to the British navigation acts, and to Napoleon's paper blockade and found expression in the most-favored-nation clause. Hippisley called Rockhill's attention to conditions which concerned us and Hay's note of September 6, 1899 expressed an old American thesis and was aimed at an evolving situation in the American interest. The territorial integrity circular of ~~John Hay~~ July 3, 1900 was quite separate, despite Mr. Kennan's historians. ~~was neither~~ John Hay was neither a dope nor a dupe, though both his originality and success became exaggerated.

The concept of foreign policy are abstract; the conduct of foreign policy is a concrete application of those ideas to specific conditions comprised of a series of situations. Mr. Kennan's technique of adding up the accumulation of historic factors as a basis for drawing a moral vivifies a

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a lecture but is not a happy way to apply policy theorems to the body of facts. A situation in foreign relations emerges as a large problem on which a decision on some specific phase of it must be taken immediately. Theoretically, that decision can be toward any degree of a circle's 360; actually, it must accord with the intrinsic policy attitude of the foreign office and the ~~momentary~~ public atmosphere of the moment. The first decision gives direction to the next; the actions of other states and events modify intentions and possibilities. The end product is a conglomeration of such fixed points, measurably different from any preconceived determination. To appraise the result as a unit in the vacuum of subsequent conception may be history but it is an anlysis of policy outside of a controlling context. Mr. Kennan vicariously recognizes this pattern.

The most serious fault of our policy, Mr. Kennan says, has been the "legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems." It is true that Americans inject moral values into everything, and Mr. Kennan neatly illustrates the fact. In his episodes he appraises political acts as mistakes or failures and offers unguaranteed alternatives by way of morals to the story. As a matter of fact, a moral obsession is an inextricable part of a democratic curiosity or responsibility in foreign affairs, of which few people at the time know the details or the relevant facts. Mr. Kennan pays just tribute to the dependability of the people of a democracy on foreign-policy questions over the long term, but finds the short-term record

of public opinion going astray into areas of emotionalism and subjectivity of little service as guides for national action. In sundry places he recognizes that the moral reaction is a short-term phenomenon when the public perceives a national interest. Having no seasoned knowledge of the situation and lacking accurate facts even more than officialdom, a citizen has no recourse first off but to express his concern in the common currency of moral terms. Those who confine themselves to a smattering of the facts, seldom get away from the strictly moral criterion in their opinions, which, being simpler, travel lightly and go farther than more informed and fully balanced judgments. The overtones of American political morality become tame in the presence of knowledge and comprehension, both of which take time to disseminate. I do not gather from Mr. Kennan's frequent wry references to morality that he really fears that it interferes with the national interests, or even runs counter to them. Moralism is more of an effort to identify the national interest in the absence of knowledge of the factual problem than a disregard of national interest. Mr. Kennan does not stress its effect in providing an escape clause from responsibility, the avoidance of which in 1900-50 period was an American characteristic. We were a "great power" in spite of ourselves and resented the position when we had to act our size. Ever since, in the early 20's, international statistics demonstrated that the United States (7% of the world's area and 6% of its population) alone accounted for 40% both of the world's production and consumption, the element of responsibility (whether

we participate or hold aloof) has been a condition of national interest. It was not until we linked power and responsibility in preparing for the Charter of the United Nations that we accepted fate.

Mr. Kennan thinks that "the legalistic approach to international affairs" ignores political problems and the deeper sources of international instability. Since the Massachusetts constitution of 1780 Americans have been emphatic in their policy, including their constitutional system, in having a "government of laws and not of men", and no policy planning is likely to overturn the idea within foreseeable decades. But here Mr. Kennan surely confuses "legalism" with law that sets standards of action, and it would seem to be the business of diplomacy as a method to apply abstract principles to concrete problems. Mr. Kennan's last lecture gives a definite impression of a concept of policy pitting one segment of power against another, for the handling of which law is said to be too inflexible and in which the diversity of states precludes the effectiveness of an international juridical regime. Nowhere in these lectures does one find any consideration of the economic factor nor a reasoned examination of the multilateral frame of standards in which states now live.

"American Diplomacy, 1900-1950" is a notable commentary, full of the wisdom of experience. Mr. Kennan's final advice to abandon the delusion of "total victory" in the conduct of foreign relations and to pursue modestly the national interest, with decent motives, without rancor or arrogance, points the way he would have us go. Deus vult.

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* The writer is alone responsible for the views expressed in the foregoing notice.